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CHAPTER V

The Kinship System

THE mothers and fathers who order farm life are themselves sons and daughters. They have or have had (before their creation of a family of their own upon the farm) much the same relationships with their parents as their children have with them. Indeed in many cases households comprise three generations. Grandfathers and grandmothers of the children live in the house. Family structure is not confined to the immediate present family group, but descends with each generation as the boys and girls reach social maturity at marriage and the creation of their own families.

This descent forms the basis of any kinship system; it provides also the basis upon which the "friends" to whom one has obligations in rural Ireland are reckoned. The individuals comprised within the system are so because of their sharing of that descent in common. These are one's "people" or "friends," in the countryman's vocabulary.

The terms express the generic category into which the kindred fall. Both terms are, in a sense, translations of Gaelic idiom. The first, people, corresponds exactly with the Irish *muinntear*. The second in ordinary rural usage refers not to a comrade, as in English, but to one's relatives. Even in the towns, one's father, mother, brothers and sisters, sons and daughters, are referred to as "immediate friends." In the countryside one speaks of one's kinsmen as one's

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601 "friends," particularly if they occupy one's own generation;
612 one's father's relatives, even his brothers, become "my father's friends." A "distant friend" refers not to distance in space but to that in cousinship.

612 Before we detail the individuals included within this
593 category, let us make two points clear. The first of these is directly associated with the dominance of the father within the family. He comes, as it were, to stand for the group which he heads; the farm is known by his name, and
[591] wife and children bear his name likewise. For the Irish family is patrilocal and patronymic, to use the technical
[611] terms. Farm, house, and most of the household goods descend from father to son with the patronym; we shall follow their general movement in a later section.

611 This patrilineal descent gives a certain accent upon the
612 kinship system; it chooses one line of descent out of the many possible and gives those who make it up a common name. There is a reflection of this fact in the groupings of Irish rural life. To outsiders a person may be known as "a boy of the Shannons" or a "man of the Flaherties," but in a sense these groupings are merely linguistic conveniences. For in many cases two families of Shannons may live side by side, yet not be considered "friends." None of the obligations of kinship bind them. For in the phrase of the countryman: "They are not the same Shannons or, if they are, they are too far out."

Our examination of the various ways of reckoning kinship will make the statement clear. Patriliny is merely one device, an extension of the father-son relationship, by which individuals are included in one's group of "friends."

593 A second observation upon the kinship system springs
582 from the fact that the family relationships regulate sexual conduct. Indeed, our examination of farm agriculture leads us to see that the technological training of the individual goes hand in hand with the sexual. Marriage prohibitions,

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601 presumably determined by counting the number of individuals or, better, personalities separated by reciprocal relations within which *col* or prohibitions arise. They are, for instance, myself, my father, my father's brother, and my father's brother's son. Here the accent upon the kinship system makes use of the two consanguine reciprocals within the immediate family: parent-child and sibling-sibling. Through the working of the principle of equivalence of siblings only two generations, my father's and my own, are considered. Thus the same reference to an immediate family relationship as we saw in such circumlocutions as "our fathers were brothers" is contained in the term.

601 Another set of terms exists in Irish for reckoning these
612 relatives. The authors have not heard it in use in Clare,
582 however. In it, first cousins are said to be *a dó a's a dó i ngaol*. The phrase means literally "two and two in blood relationship." Here accent is placed upon the lineal father-son (parent-child) descent, for brother and sister are called *a h-aon a's a h-aon i ngaol* – that is, "one and one." The reasoning here traces back to a common parent; in the latter case there is but one step, in the former, two.

The Church uses the system embodied in this last terminology in determining consanguinity. The following slightly abridged quotation indicates that it also recognizes a different system in Roman civil law.

> The civil (Roman) law founded its degrees in the number of generations. Thus between brothers there are two degrees, between first cousins there are four. [Compare *col ceathair.*] Canon law still follows this system in determining inheritance, but the Church for marriages computes, in the collateral line of consanguinity, one series only of generations, and if the series are unequal only the longer one. Hence, the principle of canon law is there are in the transverse or collateral line as many degrees of consanguinity as there are persons in the longer line counting the common stock or root.[1]

[1] *Catholic Encyclopedia*, article, "Consanguinity."

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Thus brother and sister are in the first degree, uncle and niece in the second, because niece is "two degrees from grandfather." First cousins are likewise reckoned in the second degree for the same reason. Here, as in the counting *a dó a's a dó i ngaol*, the accent is upon the parent-child reciprocal. The Church calls this the *linea recta* of descent. It bases its prohibition of marriage (incest) in the *linea recta* upon divinely ordained natural law. No dispensations for this type of marriage are ever granted.[2]

Another system is perhaps commonest – at least in Clare, where the authors have met it on several occasions – among the methods used to determine kinship in order to maintain the bounds within which alliance is forbidden. It appears both in Irish and in English speech. The system reckons descent by "generations." The Irish phrase is to *réidhteach gaol* by counting *glúin*.[3] *Gaol*, we remember, is the word for blood relationship in general; *glúin* refers first to a knee joint, then by extension to a step in family descent, a generation. In this reckoning, first cousins, that is, parents' siblings' children, are said to be in the *tríumhadh glúin*, or, in English, "the third generation."

Here the accent is again upon two elements in the constellation of reciprocals within the immediate family: the parent-child reciprocal and the equivalence of siblings. By counting back to the common grandfather or grandmother the *gaol* or "blood" is determined through three generations, i.e., ego's, his father's, and his grandfather's. Each person in the line of descent seems to represent a generation. All so descended in ego's generation are "friends."

Still another system of reckoning cousinship may be contained in certain idiomatic terms for the cousins. The authors here rely only on the Irish language dictionaries, for they have not heard these terms used. First cousins are

[2] *Ibid.*

[3] Cf. Canon O'Leary's *Mo Sgeul Féin*, where he has a chapter (*Mo Shinnsear*) in which he reckons his ancestry in these terms.

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designated in the phrase *tá siad i n-ó amháin*, which can only be translated in some such terms as "they are in the one grandson(ship)," for the word *ó* or *ua* was in ancient and medieval Irish the term for grandson and today seems to survive chiefly in the *O'* of surnames. This last idiomatic usage is merely a restatement of the reckoning by generations, and corresponds with English and Irish usage in explaining cousins by saying that they had the same grandfather.

All these systems of reckoning first cousins we have seen to be extensions outward of immediate family reciprocals to include the parents' siblings' children on the basis of their common descent with ego.

The process, however, does not stop there. For the descent is carried a step further back to a common great-grandparent. Marriage taboos and extended family obligations go backward and upward with the reckoning. Thus second cousins are recognized as being within the kindred and within the prohibited degrees. In fact, in the authors' experience the obligations of cooring and "friendliness" were equally strong with them.

To include these, all the various terminological reckonings of cousinship undergo an expansion. By the various terminologies, the group of kindred who are common descendants with ego of the same great-grandparent become *col seisear* (sixth *col*); relatives in the third degree (as reckoned by the Church); *a trí a's a trí i ngaol* (three and three); members of the *ceathradh glúin* or "fourth generation"; and lastly, in the idiomatic terms for cousinship, *ar a dá ó* (thus: in the second grandsonship).

The first of these terms, "sixth *col*," illustrates again the reckoning through counting the persons separated by reciprocal relations within which prohibitions arise. They are, for instance, patrilineally: ego (1), father (2), father's father (3), father's father's brother (4), father's father's brother's

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son (5), and the last's son (6) who is again normally within ego's generation. By counting the common root, for instance, again patrilineally, father's father's father, four generations are counted together. These four explain the *ceathradh glúin*.

Now both the Church and Irish rural society reckon descent bilaterally; all possible roots, male and female, are counted. In that case, the count gives thirty-two kinship personalities in ego's own generation who come within this group of first and second cousins. These can all be counted as cousins or "friends." They are within the range of *col* or marriage taboo. They make up the extended family whose behavior we have examined above. Of the thirty-two, only two (father's brother's son and father's father's brother's son's son) in ego's own generation bear the same patronym as he; but the total number of personalities within the system bearing ego's patronym is nine, if the immediate progenitors back to common great-grandfather are counted.

Consanguinity is carried one step further by the Church. As a barrier to marriage, or diriment impediment, it extends to the "fourth degree." This includes the group taken from a common descent yet a generation higher. It brings in those relatives known in English as third cousins.

These include all those descendant from a common great-grand-grandparent, described in the various terminologies as "third cousins," *col ochtar* (eighth *col*), members of the *cúigeadh glúin* or fifth generation, or people *ar a trí ó*. As before, the emphasis in each of these terms is to link together all those kindred of one generation who have common descent. When all possible roots are taken into account, the personalities so linked ideally number 128. The total within the whole system, including those of all generations ascendant, bearing the same patronym as ego, is thirteen, and five contemporaneous generations are comprised.

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This last group is formed then by extension outward of the same principles found within the immediate family which determined the formation of the smaller ones of first and second cousins. Ego's descent from his parents is extended upward through the ascending generations and downward through his children to the descending generations. But ego and his siblings are equivalent in their relation to their parents. So, as the parent-child reciprocal is extended vertically, a lateral extension of the equivalence of the first siblings occurs concomitantly. In this way, an ever-widening circle of individuals are brought into reciprocal relationship with ego, expressed through their bearing a name in common, as his line of descent is traced further back. The marriage taboos within the immediate family follow the extensions both vertical and lateral.

Recapitulating, then, the relationships of ego with his kindred depend upon his place in the successive generations of descent through either male or female progenitors. The emphasis in the system is twofold. In the first instance, it places the individual within a given series of parent-child relationships, and in the second it establishes a commonalty between him and the other individuals who occupy the same place within that series. The structure of the restricted family functions identically; that of the extended family uses the same mechanisms to effect an integration of individuals upon a larger scale. The great proliferation of methods of describing this kinship system arises from a cause inherent in the system. All the terms we discussed are attempts to categorize the widening circles, lateral and vertical, of kindred; the desire to establish reciprocal terms to designate the members of the widening circles; [4] there is no need to particularize except in the horizontal and vertical lines.

[4] The extension of sibling equivalence to embrace widely one's generation is further exemplified in the Irish terminology. *Bráthair*, the word etymologically cognate with *frater*, brother, is used to describe all kinsmen of one's generation;

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When these two emphases upon the kinship system are recognized, it becomes evident why there is a lack of terms describing those individuals appearing above and below ego's generation but not in the direct line. In the direct line we do have such terms as grandfather, grandson, etc., but the others do not figure. They are not named except descriptively, and even then usually only in reference to the generation which they occupy. Thus father's father's brother is called "my grandfather's brother." The term granduncle exists, but it has not found its way into the countryman's vocabulary.

Similarly, though uncle, aunt, nephew, and niece have become fully acclimated to Ireland, there is still a marked preference for descriptive terms. The son of a cousin is described in such terms, and the immediate progenitors of the cousin are thought of in terms of their place in the precedent generation. They are thus "my father's friends," though they are, of course, within ego's kinship group. In this way, two distantly removed cousins can often establish a relationship and adopt the requisite behavior to one another through establishing a more immediate connection in a parental generation.

The bounds of the consanguine group are naturally not rigid in this type of extensional structure. There is a gradation of intensity in the taboo as it extends towards the peripheral relatives. First and second cousins, to use the more convenient English terms, are tabooed, the first more strongly than the second. Third cousins, felt to be "very far out" and sometimes "not counted" by the Irish, are nevertheless formally tabooed by the Church. Yet dispensations can be obtained with relative ease for kindred of this degree. They are granted for all alliances within the system for "cause" inward even as far as first cousins and uncles and nieces, but

a different word, *dearbhráthair*, or "true-brother," is reserved for one's father's son.

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612 582 588 never within the restricted family.[5] When the dispensation of the Church is obtained, there is no feeling of horror at such marriages. They are, however, always felt to be anomalous and are a matter of comment. In the country areas where there is a necessity among the farmers of keeping farms and dowries within the extended family group, or where the introduction of an outsider is difficult because of class and regional antagonisms, marriages between first and second cousins are not uncommon. Nevertheless the general feeling of the community condemns this type of union. Too close intermarriage of this type is a common charge used by townsmen in condemning the country folk. The authors unfortunately had little chance of observing such alliances in their rural setting.

582 612 602 At marriage the individual acquires a new group of kindred. This group is also within the marriage prohibition and the "call"; they are "friends." In the formal or ideal arrangement all those related to one's wife become related to oneself in the same degree. This is the view taken by the Catholic Church. A marriage, the doctrine goes, unites husband and wife as "one flesh." "Affinity from a true marriage is a diriment impediment to the fourth degree of consanguinity of the deceased spouse." [6] A widower "may not marry any of his deceased wife's blood relatives as far as the fourth degree of consanguinity." [7]

612 835 602 In other words, the union of man and woman brings a union of the two extended families from the point of view of the marrying individuals. In the eyes of the Church, the husband stands in the same relation to a wife's relatives as does the wife herself, and vice versa. So strong is this provision in the eyes of the Church that sexual intercourse with any of the wife's kin creates a barrier to the exercise of conjugal rights over the wife. A dispensation as well as

[5] *Catholic Encyclopedia*, article, "Consanguinity."
[6] *Ibid.*
[7] *Ibid.*

absolution from the sin of adultery must be obtained before normal relations of husband and wife can be resumed. This is the effect of the infringement of the marriage taboo upon wife's relatives.

In a patrilineal, patrilocal structure, such as the Irish one, the wife is brought into the husband's family, given a place therein, and takes his patronym. Yet the inclusion is not complete, and, though a woman takes the husband's name, especially among the upper classes and at law, becomes the mistress of the husband's house, and in a thousand ways is oriented to her husband's group, her origin is never lost sight of. Her kindred are referred to as "my wife's friends," yet through the integration of the two families at marriage they become likewise "friends" of the husband. Kinship obligations extend to them.

From an internal point of view, however, marriage is a destruction of two former restricted families, in so far as two individuals leave them in order to form a new restricted family in which the individuals are husband and wife. Perhaps because of this disruptive effect on the paternal families, there is no provision made for a closer integration between them. No terms express the new relationship; the emphasis of relationship by affinity is restricted to the point of view of the marrying couple. Where the primary accent is upon vertical descent through blood kindred, there is little scope for a lateral rapport between the parental families of the marrying pair.

From the point of view of the marrying pair, however, an extension of kinship bonds is made. They are now one. Thus the immediate family of ego's wife are included in ego's kinship group. In the English terminology these relatives are called father-, mother-, brother-, sister-, son- "in-law." It must be noted that the terms brother-in-law and sister-in-law do not include wife or husband's siblings' spouses. The British and American usage extends the term

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581 601 612 to them, but neither the Church nor the Irish farmers include them within the kinship system. Marriage taboo, which the Church calls diriment impediment, does not extend to them. For this reason two brothers may marry two sisters under canon law, and a man his stepson's widow. There is no "blood" connection. For the same reason, the spouses of mother's and father's siblings, who are called uncles and aunts in American and British terminology, are not included in ego's group; "call" does not extend to them; they do not "belong" to ego.

581 611 612 The explanation of this exclusion of all relatives by affinity except those brought in by ego's own individual marriage lies in the concept of marriage uniting only the marrying individuals. For in the Irish system blood descent alone determines kinship: from the point of view of ego only those within a common system of blood descent are recognized as kin. Accordingly, on marrying, only those within a common system of descent with ego's wife become kin. Such a rigid adherence to the principle of descent does not prevent the development of very amicable and prescribed relations with such individuals as one's father's brother's wife. It merely excludes them from one's own kinship group.

601 612 The Irish terminology expresses the same reckoning of affinity. The word *cleamhnas* covers both marriage and relationship by affinity. It also indicates a "match." The word *céile* is used both as an adverb with the sense of the English word "together" and as a noun meaning "mate." 601 612 539 *Céile* is the root of various expressions, such as *céilidheacht*, referring to marriage. In Irish, father-in-law is called either *athair cleamhna* or *athair chéile*, mother-in-law *máthair chéile*, as in the proverb:

> Bean mhic is máthair chéile,
> Mar chat agus luch ar aghaidh a céile

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(mother-in-law and daughter-in-law like cat and mouse together).

Similar terms are used for brother- and sister-in-law. But in both languages the tendency is again to use purely descriptive phrases analogous to those we found in designating blood kindred. Thus "my wife's brother" and "my wife's mother," etc., are much more often heard among the farmers, both in English and in Irish.

The Irish language, however, has a separate term for son-in-law. It is *cliamhan*, which is related to the word *cleamhnas*. It is the only nondescriptive term in general use, for daughter-in-law is rendered as "son's wife" (*bean mhic*) in Irish. It may be that the singling out of this relative among those united to one by affinity reflects the greater importance put upon males in a patrilineal system.

The relatives by affinity just described include all those of the spouse's immediate family. The principle at work has been to coalesce ego's immediate or restricted kindred with his wife's. Beyond this group to whom the extension of the kinship behaviors is primary lies the total group of the wife's extended kindred. They are referred to as "my wife's friends"; there is a general tendency to extend kinship behavior to them; and they lie within the prohibited group. They are what might be expressed as potential kindred in the same sense that ego's third, fourth, and fifth cousins, their progenitors and descendants, are potential kindred. Should the need arise, the common descent may be remembered. At times of family crises, particularly at funerals, this sort of bond comes into active force.

In this fact lies the peculiar character of a kinship system based upon extension rather than rigidity of form. The demarcations between the kindred groups of one individual and the next are not rigidly drawn. The individual can expand and contract the group outward from the restricted family to which he belongs. If he is important in the com-

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612 554 602 munity, he can command the respect and the services of a great number of kindred; it becomes an advantage to the peripheral relatives to establish the reciprocals of behavior which the system allows. On the other hand, if the individual is without personal importance, the scope of his actual integration through behavior to his kindred may be narrowed down to include only members of his immediate family.

612 602 It is the potentiality of extension and contraction within the kinship group which is both praised and condemned in such phrases as "A neighbor is nearer than a friend" and "The higher the man, the more people he has." If the individual attempts to rise above his fellows or to forget them in his way upward, the cry immediately rises that he is "forgetting his friends." In fact, disloyalty to one's kinship group is felt to be a deadly crime against the group.

596 612 The Irish extended family, combining in different degrees of intensity of solidarity all descendants of a common ancestor through five contemporaneous generations, is not a rigidly defined structure set off from the other groups of society. On the contrary, the extended families present a picture of a series of interlocking pyramids in which each individual is assigned a definite place, but in which no two individuals (unless siblings) occupy quite the same place. It is a group of kindred reckoning common bilateral descent, and linking as equals all individuals occupying the same step within that descent to the number of five such steps, and including the corresponding group of the spouse's [614] kindred. It is in no sense a clan or gens, as its bounds are not constant, but descend and ascend through the total group of possible kindred. That is, an existing group resolves itself into a number of new ones, as descent proceeds from father to son. It is because of this that farmers having the same patronym and living side by side yet may not be "friends."

Through the workings in and out of the interlocking series of pyramids mentioned above, an isolated area of small population can soon become inextricably intertangled. Hence in the poorest and most isolated regions we find the greatest amount of intermarriage. Evidence is not definite on this score, but the indications point in that direction. As these have been generally the last regions to lose the Irish language, it is there that we find the greatest proliferation of terminologies whose purpose is to preserve the structure and to determine the precise limits set for marriages. Marriages under such conditions force a nice adjustment of reduplicated kinship bonds. Dispensations are obtained under the conditions we have mentioned, and accordingly the parish priest is made a party to every marriage, a great extension of his authority.

582 601 612 621 [793]

Through such intermingling, it very often happens that a comparatively large area will be peopled entirely by individuals standing within near degrees of kinship one to another. In such a case the local group attains the added solidarities of common kinship. To an outsider, such a group, closely integrated through kinship bonds, occupying the same general level of social stratification and the same general place in the economic system, and dominating a large or small area (sometimes as large as a parish), presents a united front. It exhibits a very effective solidarity against outsiders. It is this solidarity which gives rise to the assumption among outside observers that the clan still exists in rural Ireland. It is this solidarity, too, which expresses itself in the political cohesion of large sections of the countryside.

602 612 621 [609]

In the appended figure (Fig. 10) one can get a view of this reckoning of descent within this kinship system as a whole. The figure is arranged in block form and divided between left and right by male and female sex. The generations are numbered after the fashion of a checkerboard. and each block or square represents a kinship personality. Each

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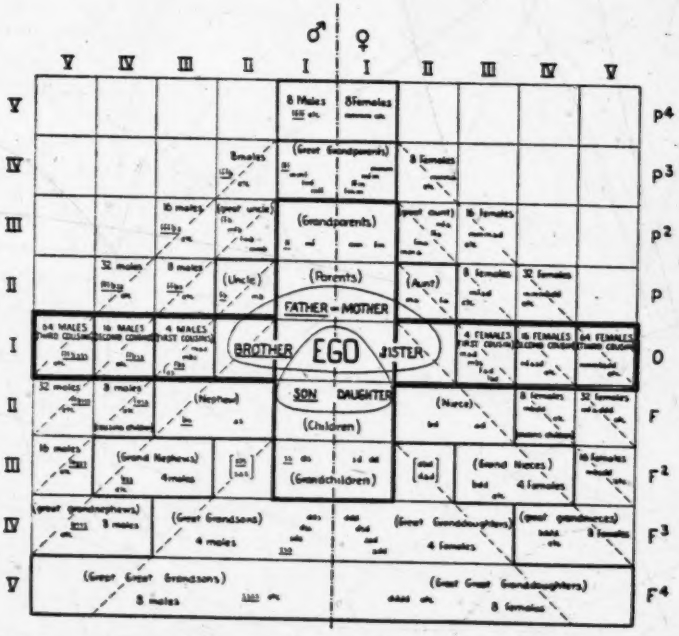
square is contingent to that of its parent of the same sex and to that of its child of the same sex. Thus the lines of descent strike one's eye at a glance. The English terms adorn each square, and small letters in each square give the abbreviation for the designation of the personalities whose place

FIGURE 10

KINSHIP AND DESCENT



the square represents and who are grouped together under a common term. A number is included which lists the number of personalities in all possible descent lines represented by the square.

Anyone interested in explaining to himself the Irish reckonings, such as for instance "fourth *col*," need only count off the squares from ego.

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The groups usually designated are shown within blocks united under heavier margins. Thus those grouped in double black margin across the whole diagram, taking in all the generation marked horizontally as I and O, are ego's "friends." They are members of his generation, united by common descent reckoned back five generations to common great-great-grandparent.

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It goes without saying, of course, that, except for minor variations, this system is essentially that of all northern and western Europe. It is that of the United States. It is technically a descriptive, bilateral, patrilineal system. Like all kinship systems without exception throughout the whole world, it provides for reckoning in a common scheme nine generations, five of which must already occupy the past. Like all others, it represents a self-consistent system built up of the relationships within the immediate family.

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